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STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR JOHN E. PEURIFOY BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICAN, HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON COMMUNIST AGGRESSION

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me say that I am deeply and sincerely pleased at the opportunity to testify before your committee. I believe that the Communist attempt to seize Guatemala, and particularly their reversal last June, is one of the most dramatic episodes that has taken place in a long and tremendously costly ideological struggle that has engulfed us since the end of World War II. As several witnesses commented, Mr. Chairman, we have seen one free people after another disappear behind the Iron Curtain. Last June in Guatemala, for the first time one of them returned. The revolution led by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, demonstrates what a few courageous, determined, and dedicated persons can accomplish even in the face of the organized might and ruthlessness of a police state.

Before beginning my testimony, Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to explode a popular and flattering myth regarding the part that I personally played in the revolution led by Colonel Castillo. My role in Guatemala prior to the revolution was strictly that of a diplomatic observor; to inform my government regarding events there, and, when requested to do so, to advise the responsible officials in the Department of State on policy matters

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This is text of statement read by Ambassador Peurifoy. It was cleared by Mr. Groves AR/MP and Mr. Richards 10/9/54.

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concerning Guatemala. The first and only active role that I played in the events last June was to lend my good offices to assist in negotiating the truce between the forces of Colonel Castillo, and the military junta that was established in Guatemala after President Arbenz resigned. And even this role, Mr. Chairman, was undertaken only at the request of the junta. The revolution that overthrew the Arbenz government was engineered and instigated by those people in Guatemala who rebelled against the policies and ruthless oppression of the Communist-controlled government.

It is my understanding, Mr. Chairman, that the purpose of your hearings are to determine:

1. Whether or not the government of President Arbenz was controlled and dominated by Communists.

2. Whether or not the Communists who dominated Guatemala were in turn directed from the Kremlin.

3. Whether or not the Communists from Guatemala actively intervened in the internal affairs of neighboring Latin American republics.

4. Whether or not this Communist conspiracy which centered in Guatemala represented a menace to the security of the United States.

My answer to all four of those questions, Mr. Chairman, is an unequivocal "yes."

The Arbenz government, beyond any question, was controlled and dominated by Communists. Those Communists were directed from Moscow. The Guatemalan government and the Communist leaders of that country did continuously and actively intervene in the internal affairs of neighboring countries, in an effort to create disorder and overthrow established governments.

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And the Communist conspiracy in Guatemala did represent a very real and very serious menace to the security of the United States.

And with your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would like to add a fifth point; that menace still continues in Latin America.

The Red conspiracy in Latin America has not been completely crushed. The loss of Guatemala represents a serious setback to the Kremlin, not a final defeat. As President Castillo pointed out, in a statement before your committee, the democratic forces have merely won the first battle in a long war.

Of course it is true, Mr. Chairman, that the seriousness of the threat to our security has been greatly diminished since Colonel Castillo's successful revolution. Nevertheless, as long as this conspiracy is active--and I fear that will be for many years to come--the menace will continue to be a very real one in this Hemisphere.

That is the reason why I think your committee is rendering a very substantial service to the American people in holding these hearings. Your committee is alerting the public of the danger to us represented by Moscow's program of aggression in Latin America. As you know, Mr. Chairman, it is exceedingly difficult for our government to formulate effective policies to combat a situation as serious as this one, without the support of a well-informed public. ~~In my opinion, one of the most serious aspects of the situation, is the fact that in no other area of world affairs is the American public so poorly informed as it is in respect to our closest neighbors.~~

republics of Latin America. I believe that these hearings will not only be invaluable to Congress in evaluating legislative proposals concerning Latin America, but that they will also greatly assist the executive branch, by mobilizing informed public opinion.

Now with your permission, I should like to elaborate briefly on the four points summarized above.

I believe that an incident which occured shortly before I became Ambassador to Guatemala, illustrates conclusively the fact that the government was under the complete domination of the Communists. One of the principle programs of the Communist Party in Guatemala was the agrarian reform, which they used as a weapon to gain political control over the farm workers and the landless peasants. I understand that an officer of the Department of State may testify before your committee at a later date, and will be prepared to give you a more detailed discussion of the agrarian reform law. For the purpose of my testimony, it is sufficient to state that under the agrarian reform law President Arbenz was the final arbiter of any and all dispute concerning the expropriation of land and its redistribution among the peasants. Owners of expropriated land were denied the right of appeal to the courts. Nevertheless, one Guatemala land owner did appeal. And on February 6, 1953, the Supreme Court of Guatemala rocked the government and particularly the Communist Party by announcing, as a result of a 4-1 vote, that it would hear the land-owners' appeal. The decision was immediately and ~~a~~grily denounced by the Communists who charged that it was in violation of that section

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of the law denying the right of such appeal. Carlos Manuel Pellecer, Victor Manuel Gutierrez, Jose Manuel Fortuny, and other Communist leaders demanded that the court be impeached. The next day a resolution was submitted to the Congress by a Communist deputy, was immediately passed and the entire court was impeached. New judges were quickly appointed, including the one who had voted against granting the hearings, the decision was hastily reconsidered by the new court and the owner was denied the right of appeal.

Mr. Chairman, I submit to this committee that when the Communist Party can demand and get the dismissal of a Supreme Court of a country, then the Communist Party, for all practical purposes, controls the government of that country.

This, however, is only one illustration of the degree of control that the Communists exercised over the government of Guatemala during the regimes of Juan Jose Arevlo and Jacobo Arbenz.

The facts of Communist penetration of the Guatemala Government and of the political, economic and social life of the nation are well known to your committee. It is hardly necessary for me to recall the salient features -- that of the 56 members of the Guatemalan Congress 51 were members of the "national front" supporting Arbenz and dominated by its Communist members; that principal Government agencies in agriculture, social security, propaganda and public information, education, and labor were in the direct hands of the Communist Party; that the labor organization of the country was entirely dominated by Communist controlled unions, affiliated with the Communist Western Hemisphere labor arm, the CTAL, and with the world-wide Soviet labor instrument, the WFTU. In addition, the press, radio and public forum were increasingly warped into tools of Communist propaganda and relentlessly being closed to anti-Communist patriotic Guatemalans. The Guatemalan delegates to international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the numerous regional and functional agencies of international cooperation which have been set up to aid the world wide cause of peace were mere spokesmen for Soviet aggression and deception.

This Communist penetration in Guatemala was the most striking example of the Kremlin's strategy in Latin America. Busy with power expansion into Europe and Asia, the Red rulers of Russia have long pushed their conspiracy in Latin America as a diversionary tactic which, while showing no immediate gain of territory under their domination, would at least weaken and harass our defenses. By creating a beachhead within our own zone of vital security,

from which

from which sabotage and subversion could be achieved against us and our neighbors, the Kremlin aimed at promoting anarchy within the Western Hemisphere; they aimed at demoralizing this Hemisphere by breaking its unity against Communist aggression and throwing the inter-American system into a state of confusion and dispute. They sought to divert Latin American attention from their depradations and crimes in Europe and Asia by pushing forward Spanish-speaking ~~[illegible]~~ FRONT MEN who, in native accents, accused the United States of the aggressions and crimes which the Soviet itself was actually performing.

The Communists in Guatemala were working for these Soviet aims under consistent and disciplined Soviet control. This control was exercised directly through the Communist Party itself. Seven of the eleven members of the Party's political committee are known to have visited the Soviet Union, six of them having made trips in the past two years. Jose Manuel Fortuny, the Party's Secretary General, took his most recent trip to Moscow from November 5, 1953 to January 12, 1954. The Party's leaders in labor unions, agrarian unions, and teacher unions all visited the Soviet Union in recent times, at least within the past two years, as did also leaders of Communist front organizations such as the youth organization, the women's organization and the university students' front.

The effectiveness of the training and instruction given to the Guatemalan Communists while in the Soviet Union was immediately manifest in the close integration of the Communist institutions in Guatemala with Soviet policy. No case of Soviet direction was more clear than what occurred after the return of Fortuny last January. A press and propaganda campaign, stirring alarm over resistence of anti-Communists to the Arbenz regime, was

immediately

immediately cranked up in the endeavor to prepare public opinion for the blow to fall. Then, at the end of January 1954, the dramatic announcement was made of the uncovering of a subversive "plot", with the sinister note of foreign intervention, linking the United States by innuendo as "the country of the North" from which direction and aid was allegedly being furnished the "plotters". This set the stage for wholesale arrests of anti-Communist citizens and for subsequent imprisonment, torture and even murder. Many who were later released, beaten and broken, were pushed across the frontiers into Mexico and Honduras by the vicious truncheon-wielding police. These victims of Communist suppression comprised outstanding leaders in the free labor movement, the independent press, radio commentators, and the decent citizenry who did not bow down to a Communist state ruled by Arbenz. Your committee is well aware that these tactics of brutal suppression and terrorization of the opposition is characteristically the last blow of Communism in a country outside of the Soviet Union before complete seizure of power.

The contacts between the Guatemalan Communist Party and the international Communist movement were easily maintained through travel other than to Moscow. Guatemalan Communist labor leaders, for instance, affiliated with and working for the Soviet international labor organization, travelled to the WFTU headquarters in the Soviet sector of Vienna in Eastern Europe, and made lengthy visits to the Communist centers in Budapest and Bucharest, under the guise of attendance at annual conventions of international Communist labor organizations. Leaders of the youth organization, the "Alliance of Democratic Youth of Guatemala", affiliated with the World Federation of Democratic Youth with headquarters in Bucharest, Rumania, sent its leaders behind the Iron Curtain

each year

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each year to attend and receive instructions at these Soviet congresses. The women's organization, the "Guatemalan Women's Alliance" affiliated with the International Federation of Democratic Women, with headquarters in the Soviet sector of Berlin. The student group, "The Democratic University Front" affiliated with the International Student Unions with headquarters in Prague, Czechoslovakia, sent its delegates to these student meetings for their dose of Communist indoctrination and organization. The phony peace front, "The National Peace Committee", affiliated with the World Peace Council, also with headquarters in Communist Czechoslovakia, made ample use of the various Soviet sponsored so-called "Peace Conferences" held in Europe and Asia, as a means of orientation, instruction and indoctrination of Guatemalan Communists travelling as delegates to these affairs.

I have for the committee's attention a chart indicating travel back and forth to the Soviet Union by principal Guatemalan Communists in recent years. "A"

No one knowing the complexity of operating a large political movement on an international scale can observe the cohesion which the Communist organizations in Guatemala displayed with their international Communist headquarters without realizing that such would be impossible without the most efficient and rapid system of communications, instruction and directives. Frequent travels to Moscow, useful and necessary though they are for training and indoctrination, are hardly sufficient to assure simultaneous action of all cogs in a world-wide machine. This system requires communications and these we know were regularly transmitted by courier, radio and cable.

The presence

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The presence of the Soviet Embassy in neighboring Mexico kept open a channel of communications, enjoying the privilege of diplomatic immunity and confidential codes; and it was no accident that the two principal Guatemalan representatives in Mexico were both identifiable Communists, Ambassador Alvarado Fuentes and Consul General Pinto Usaga.

The Soviet itself did not plant its own diplomatic mission in Guatemala, as this would have been too obvious a link between the Guatemalan Communists, traitors to their country, and the great Soviet fatherland whose agents they had become. Just as the GuatemalanCommunist Party did not disclose itself under its true name until 1951, preferring the security of a veiled operation within other parties, so the Soviet itself did not show its hand openly, but operated through satellite missions, commercial travelers, and its own travelling officials, such as the Commercial Attaché of the Embassy in Mexico City.

The threat of Soviet Communism, which is dedicated to expansion, conquest and ultimate world revolution, was therefore not directed against Guatemala alone but to its peaceful and vulnerable neighbors. The Guatemalan people were the first nation in the Hemisphere to suffer Communist control, but others WERE MARKED FOR CONQUEST ~~would soon have followed~~. The Guatemalan Government, as a tool of Soviet policy, aimed at disruption of the peace of the area by cynically maintaining a sustained campaign to undermine their governments.

Your committee has already heard testimony to the effect that the principle Communists of Central America have received refuge, aid and

comfort in

comfort in Guatemala. Many of them had even been rewarded with government jobs. These foreign agents of communism were thus able to use Guatemala as a base for their operations against their home countries. They were assisted in their subversive activities by scores of Guatemalan Communists and many Spanish Communists who were given visas to Guatemala during the early years of President Arevalo's regime. The increasing flow of propaganda material and trained agitators from Guatemala into the neighboring countries of El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua became so overt that each of these governments, at various times, found it necessary to close their borders to Guatemalan travellers, and to invoke rigid restrictions on all travel. This committee will be interested in these samples of communist propaganda, printed in Guatemala, and freely circulated in Central America. I am glad to submit these copies.

One of the most blatant examples of intervention by Guatemalan Communists in the affairs of neighboring republics was the strike which paralyzed Honduras for eight weeks last Spring.

The success of their efforts came to startled public attention on May 1, 1954, when a general strike broke out in the northern area of the country and continued for a period of eight weeks. There had been no previous labor disturbances in Honduras, no negotiations for contracts pending, and no rejections of workers' petitions. The duration of the

strike would

strike would have been impossible without substantial help from abroad. There is ample evidence that the strike was planned, instigated and directed from Guatemala, and was undoubtedly intended to unseat the Honduran Government. Help to the strikers was channeled through Guatemala and consisted not only of guidance and instructions but surely of the material aid publicly promised by the Communist-dominated Guatemalan National Federation of Labor, for a minimum calculation of the cost of the strike, involving as many as 44,000 ~~workers~~ workers over a period up to eight weeks, would indicate it to be not less than three-quarters of a million dollars. No such sums of money were ever collected among the strikers in Honduras and could only have come from a foreign power. The Honduran Government, which had seized a Guatemalan military plane which flew into the northern area of the country without authorization a month before the strike, found reason to expel three Guatemalan Honorary Consuls who had been appointed to small towns in the strike zone only a few months before. The damage to the economy of Honduras was very considerable and was clearly a part of the Communist plan to disrupt Central America.

The jars and jolts to Guatemala's neighbors in Central America through strikes, political agitation and subversion were evidences of the growing Communist threat, but it was during the critical period of

the spring of 1954

the spring of 1954 that the Soviet made its big stab to solidify its strength in Guatemala. This was the shipment of arms on the SS Alfhem, which came into Puerto Barrios on May 15, 1954. The cargo manifest was fraudulent, listing as glassware and laboratory equipment some 2,000 tons of modern arms for the Arbenz Government, packed in more than 15,000 cases. The cargo, which was of Czech origin, had left the Communist port of Stettin, Poland, about three weeks before and pursued a zig-zag course across the Atlantic, giving false destinations three times en route. The Guatemalan armed forces were not without arms and their numbers were already at least equal and probably superior to the total armed forces of the three immediate neighbors, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. The Soviet primarily intended to drive a wedge into the middle of this continent. The four Central American governments, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, all communicated to the Department of State their request for joint measures against the introduction of further armed force into the area. Our Government was moving rapidly to present this threat to all members of the Organization of American States, for action by the inter-American system, when the movement by Colonel Castillo Armas in late June 1954 overthrew the Communist Government which had acquired the arms.

How thoroughly the Arbenz Government was following the dictates of the Soviet Union was clearly shown during this crisis in the incident of the non-aggression pacts. At a moment when the alarm of Guatemala's

neighbors

neighbors was highest over the Alfhem shipment the Guatemalan Foreign Minister ostentatiously sent cables to the governments of Honduras and El Salvador, protesting friendship and offering to sign treaties of non-aggression with them. The very term used "non-aggression pact", was a give-away of the inspiration whence this maneuver came. It is a Soviet term, unfamiliar to Central American diplomacy, and almost unheard of in the relations of our hemisphere, which has a long and honored history of peaceful settlement of disputes by the machinery set up in our inter-American system. The non-aggression pact idea has repeatedly been used as a tactic of deception. Indeed, if we could write an accurate dictionery defenition of the term "non-aggression pact" it would be "(a) Agreement between Stalin and Hitler on August 23, 1939, just before outbreak World War II which paved way for Nazi attack and was later used to conceal preparation for war between Russia and Germany; (b) Any similar agreement, apparently for peaceful purposes but concealing intent to make war". Guatemala's smaller neighbors were not deceived, and rejected the invitation, reminding the Guatemalan Government that no need for such a pact exists between peace-loving neighbors. Indeed, Honduras invited Guatemala to show its peaceful purposes by ceasing to support the strike in northern Honduras.

The Guatemalan Communists also planned high-level infiltration of all Central America, but in this adventure their plans were too ambitious and failed.

We in the United States are always so conscious of our own mistakes, Mr. Chairman, and I might add particularly those mistakes in the fields of foreign affairs, that is rather comforting to note that the other side sometimes makes their mistakes, too. One such incident involved the Organization of Central American States, which is generally referred to as ODECA. Such an organization had been discussed for generations among the Central American Republics. In 1951 the Communist-oriented Government of Guatemala, anxious to extend its influence in Central America, seized the initiative and sent proposals to the governments of El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica that a conference be held to lay plans to form such an organization. The conference was held at San Salvador, and a charter of the organization was adopted. An interim committee was set up. A subsequent meeting to draft final plans was scheduled in Guatemala in the latter part of 1952.

However, suspicion developed that the Communists of Guatemala planned to use the new organization as an additional vehicle for extending their influence into the affairs of neighboring Central American Republics. Shortly before the meeting in Guatemala City was to be held, the Government of El Salvador became so incensed at the activities of Guatemalan Communists agitating within that country,

that they closed the borders, rounded up more than 1500 Guatemalan nationals, and expelled many of them from the country. Then the Government of El Salvador notified the other members of ODECA that it proposed to submit a resolution at the conference in Guatemala City, demanding investigation of Communism in Central America and the adoption of measures by all five Central American countries to counteract this menace. This boomerang of Communist plans was exceedingly embarrassing to the Arbenz government, for the organization Arbenz had initiated in an effort to extend Communist influence was threatening to go into reverse and become a vehicle to combat Communism. The Arbenz Government twice postponed the proposed conference in Guatemala City, and exerted the strongest diplomatic pressure on El Salvador not to submit its proposed resolution. When these efforts failed and El Salvador stood firm in its intent, Guatemala finally withdrew from ODECA, on April 1, 1953, brazenly charging its neighbors with "aggression". This is another typical Soviet tactic, to accuse the peaceful victims of Communist schemes of the very crime which the Communist aggressors are about to commit against them.

To attract as much attention as possible, the Guatemalan Foreign Minister sent a message to the Security Council of the United Nations repeating the same charges. He did not, however, ask for any action, which was in its way a confession that the charges lacked proof and that the forum of the United Nations was used only for propaganda purposes. Since it was obvious that only one country, Guatemala, was the source

of the Communist problem in the area, the Arbenz regime could not tolerate that its activities against its neighbors be placed under the spot light of an international meeting. And it had one other equally serious motivation, that the Organization of Central American States, a new and valiant effort by these small countries themselves to integrate their economies and lift the living standards of their people, should collapse and not become a bulwark against Communist advances in the area.

I need hardly refer to the menace of this Soviet attempt to win Central America as aimed at our own vital interests and security; this is self-evident, for geography alone supplies the reason. Central America lies almost at our southern borders, no more that three hours' flying time by modern warplanes from the Gulf ports, and even nearer to our greatest strategic installation anywhere in the world, the Panama Canal. If any part of this area should fall under Soviet power, it would shake the foundations of our defenses. The Soviets know that. They were willing to pay a very high price in funds, manpower, organization, propaganda and subversive skills to gain a base in Guatemala; and we know that the hardheaded, practical men of the Kremlin dedicate their best efforts on objectives which strike closest to the United States. For if we should weaken and succumb, the road would lie open to their domination of the whole world.

Thus the struggle of the Guatemalan people to throw off the Communist control was as much a struggle for the safety of Guatemala's neighbors, and ourselves, as it was to regain their own liberties.

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In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, let me state that the menace of Communism in Guatemala was courageously fought by the Guatemalan people themselves, always against the superior odds which a police state has over the decent, patriotic citizen. Communist power was broken by the Guatemalans alone, and their deeds of heroic sacrifice deserve and will always receive the admiration and applause of our own people. They fought the battle which is the common battle of all free nations against Communist oppression, and they won the victory themselves.

President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles have both publicly pledged our support to the new Government of Colonel Castillo Armas, and our aid to the Guatemalan people. It is my earnest hope and confidence that all feasible means to extend this aid will be promptly developed, so that Guatemala may resume its place as a prosperous and progressive member in the family of free nations.